FOX RIVER CURRENT

Spring 2006 Vol. 9, No. 1 Update from the Lower Fox River Intergovernmental Partnership

EPA, DNR Review Basis of Design Report

By Susan Pastor, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources are considering sand covers and engineered caps as possible changes to the current cleanup plan for PCB-contaminated sediment in the Lower Fox River and Green Bay, as outlined in a recent report.

Georgia-Pacific and NCR Corp., the two companies that have committed to designing the cleanup of the last 13 miles of the Lower Fox River, submitted the report called a basis of design in early March. It is a technical summary of all of the information that has been gathered since the agencies approved a cleanup plan in 2003 (referred to as the record of decision). It also lays the groundwork for developing the engineering design of the cleanup.

A lot of information has been collected by consultants working with the companies, EPA and DNR. Initial reviews confirmed many of the facts that lead to the 2003 decision, however, additional information showed that some of the agencies' assumptions were incorrect. "This information was shared at two public meetings in 2005," said Greg Hill, DNR implementation coordinator.

At press time, the agencies began their review of the basis of design to see if possible changes to the original cleanup plan need to be made. That plan called for dredging millions of cubic yards of sediment, sometimes in areas where dredging would be difficult. "Dredging is not possible in some areas because that could cause some damage to the riverbanks," explained EPA Remedial Project Manager Jim Hahnenberg. "Some areas near banks and in the center of the river have contaminated sediment that is so deep, it would be very difficult to dredge."

While dredging alone seemed like a good idea three years ago, new information has shown that combining dredging with other cleanup methods may be a better option. "Dredging straight down in some areas might cause the edges of the holes to cave in," he stated. "So, dredges would have to dig a long distance across rather than straight down to get to the contaminated sediment. This means that large amounts of clean sediment might be dug up and disposed of unnecessarily."

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A New Look

By Susan Pastor, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

This issue of the *Fox River Current* brings a new look as well as a new schedule. The format is moving from bi-monthly to quarterly. This means you will receive the *Current* in late March, June, September and December. In addition, some issues may be shorter since the "Profile" section will no longer be a regular feature. Articles on local natural resource damage assessment projects and cleanup of the river, Little Lake Butte des Morts and Green Bay will continue.

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This is where capping after some dredging may be a more effective approach. The engineered cap would consist of a foot or more of sand as well as a gravel layer to ensure that the cap stays in place. Additionally, in areas slightly above cleanup goals, having only a thin layer of contaminated sediment and sand cover might be better than dredging. This sand cover would reduce exposure to contaminants to a safe level.

In addition to the physical difficulties, extra dredging could mean higher costs, according to Hahnenberg. "This would make the costs higher and the cleanup time longer to complete. It could also use up more limited local landfill space than is needed."

"If we think we need to make major changes to our earlier decision, we would make sure that interested community members are given the chance to provide comments on these possible modifications before finalizing our plans."

Hahnenberg said there are other reasons to consider changing the cleanup plan. "In certain areas of the river from Appleton to the bay, there are places where contamination is slightly above EPA's cleanup level of 1 part per million," he continued. "Amounts of PCBs there are so small, these areas are not a major risk to people or the environment. Costs to remove sediment in these places would mean a lot more money spent for little benefit. These are the types of areas that would lend themselves to a sand cover."

"These ideas came from new insights as we gathered new information as part of the design process which includes a lot of additional sampling and analysis," said Hahnenberg. "This is not unusual especially for large complex sites like the Fox River as we learn more and do more in-depth engineering work on our projects. This is why we include enough flexibility in our decisions so we can change course if it makes sense to do that."

Also included in the proposed changes will be a modification regarding the way sediment would be separated from water and how trucks would be used to transport the sediment to a licensed landfill for proper disposal. This modification involves a different technique called mechanical dewatering which would eliminate the need for a pipeline from the river to southern Brown County.

If EPA and DNR agree to propose changes to the original plan, a mandatory process to amend the 2003 record of decision would occur. Similar to the process followed more than three years ago, the agencies would prepare a proposed plan that would outline the suggested changes and compare them to the original components. Public comment will be accepted on the new plan.

"If we think we need to make major changes to our earlier decision, we would make sure that interested community members are given the chance to provide comments on these possible modifications before finalizing our plans," Hahnenberg added.

Recommended changes to the original plan would come after a thorough review of the basis of design report. While public review has been moved to late spring, EPA and DNR have been discussing its contents while still in draft form. "We are having detailed discussions with the paper companies and their consultants to address our concerns while trying to anticipate the public's concerns as much as possible."

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Hahnenberg said amending a record of decision is something EPA takes very seriously. "There is a lot of information to evaluate," he concluded. "Before any decision is formally amended, we give it a lot of thought to be sure we are doing the right thing based on the information we have today."

The basis of design report is available for review at the information repositories listed on Page 7. It has also been posted on the DNR Web site: http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/wm/foxriver/reportsanddocs.html

The Record of Decision Amendment Process

1. Draft proposed changes—late spring
2. Issue proposed plan—early summer
3. Hold comment period lasting at least 30 days—early summer
4. Hold public meeting—early summer
5. Review and consider comments—mid summer
6. Write response to comments—late summer
7. Issue new record of decision—fall

At press time, all dates were approximate.

Out and About...

By Susan Pastor, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

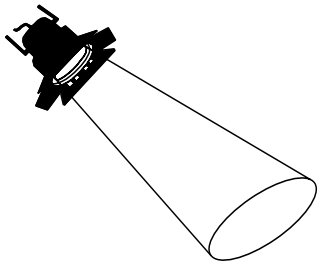
The Fox River Intergovernmental Partnership is made up of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin and Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin. These partners, as well as other supporting agencies, regularly provide speakers to organizations in the Fox Valley area. The following people recently made presentations:

March

- *Greg Hill*, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources: Department of the Interior 2006 Natural Resource Damage Assessment Restoration Program National Workshop, Phoenix, AZ; coordination of NRDAR and cleanup activities.
- *Greg Hill,* DNR and *Colette Charbonneau,* U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Department of the Interior 2006 NRDAR Program National Workshop, Phoenix, AZ; Lower Fox River/Green Bay restoration success.

The Fox River Current is featuring promising natural resource damage assessment projects in and near the Lower Fox River.

Spotlight On:



Protecting the Garden Bluffs, Garden Peninsula, Michigan

By Colette Charbonneau, Fish and Wildlife Service

Restoration settlement funds were used to acquire 230 acres of coastal plain marsh and buffering upland forest on the west side of the Garden Peninsula on Michigan's Big Bay De Noc in northern Green Bay. The land acquisition added to a larger habitat protection project completed by The Nature Conservancy that now encompasses over 650 acres including six miles of Lake Michigan frontage and the associated shoreline habitat. The Fox River/Green Bay Natural Resource Trustee Council approved funding for the project in 2004.

PHOTO COURTESY OF U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Coastal plain wetland habitat purchased along Garden Bluffs on Garden Peninsula, Mich. This habitat is important as nursery and feeding areas for native fish species.

"This is a spectacular piece of property and we were fortunate that the owners care about conservation," said Jeff Knopp, TNC's director of protection for the Upper Peninsula. "We don't get a chance like this often to save miles of Lake Michigan shoreline and a spectacular hemlock forest."

The new preserve, Garden Bluffs Conservation Area, will be owned and managed by TNC and open to general public for passive recreational pursuits such as hiking, fishing and cross county skiing.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has identified the coastal areas of the Garden Peninsula as outstanding cool and cold water fisheries due to the natural topography of the area including the shallow sand bars and coastal plain wetlands, most notably, those shoreline areas in and around the Garden Bluffs. These coastal areas provide important nursery and foraging habitat for a variety of native fish species such as walleye, smallmouth bass and lake whitefish that were harmed due to the release of PCBs into the environment.

Birders have long considered the Garden Peninsula as a haven for nesting and migratory shorebirds and songbirds alike. "While visiting the area with the trustee council's restoration technical representatives team in 2004, a bald eagle nest was found on the

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property with a pair using the nest," stated Knopp. "The group also saw a pair of osprey fly overhead." The area contains good habitat for other coastal birds including Caspian tern, common tern, and black-crowned night heron.

The restoration project not only protects important coastal wetland habitat, but includes Great Lakes sand and cobble beaches, white cedar conifer forest, an alkaline cliff community and buffering deciduous (trees that shed their leaves) forest. These unique habitats are areas where rare ferns grow and federally listed threatened dwarf lake iris carpets the forest floor while at least six other state-listed species can be found.

The natural resource trustees are comprised of the states of Wisconsin and Michigan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

For further information on NRDA projects, contact Trustee Council Coordinator Colette Charbonneau, FWS, at Colette_Charbonneau@fws.gov or at (920) 866-1726.

PHOTO COURTESY OF U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Cobble beach habitat found along the recently purchased property. When flooded, the cobbles are important areas where fish lay their eggs. As an exposed beach, the habitat is an important feeding area for birds.

Trustee Council Marks Four Successful Years

By Susan Pastor, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Several paper companies signed federal legal agreements over the past five years to fund cleanup and restoration projects in and near the Lower Fox River. Today, the Fox River/Green Bay Natural Resource Trustee Council is reflecting on the projects that were made possible through these agreements.

According to Trustee Council Coordinator Colette Charbonneau, approximately $37 million was made available for restoration projects. Since 2002, the council has approved 71 projects with 21 of those completed. About $30.6 million in NRDA restoration settlement funds have gone towards projects and $20 million in funds and in-kind services have been contributed to match or supplement settlement funds. According to Charbonneau, projects continue to be submitted and reviewed to use unspent funds.

"What I found most rewarding was the amount of funds and in-kind services contributed as a match to the NRDA settlement dollars as well as the amount of work that has been completed," Charbonneau said.

Some of that work has included:

- 945 acres of wetlands enhanced
- 146 acres of upland prairie waterfowl nesting areas restored
- 90 acres of oak savanna restored
- 325 acres of wetlands restored
- six acres of spawning habitat for walleye restored
- 171 acres reforested to control spring water runoff and improve water quality

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Oneida Tribe Receives Funding for Three Restoration Projects

By Greg Swanson, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

The Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin is developing three restoration projects totaling $140,000 using Natural Resource Damage Assessment funds along with other matching funds to improve and protect wetland and other habitat on and near the Oneida reservation.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ONEIDA TRIBE OF INDIANS OF WISCONSIN

The Oneida nation has been working to restore and preserve stream channels throughout the reservation.

According to Betsy Galbraith, environmental specialist in restoration for the Oneida tribe and coordinator for the tribe's NRDA restoration activities, "These projects are very important to the Oneida's overall natural resource management plans that increase tribal members' opportunities to experience the cultural and recreational uses of their natural resources."

A $30,000 stream restoration project for Lancaster Brook, a class II trout stream located in the northern portion of the Oneida reservation, will be undertaken this year. Residential development and poor agricultural practices have damaged the stream and dramatically reduced the habitat suitable for the trout population. By restoring the stream channel, habitat for brook trout and food and cover for a variety of other aquatic animals will be improved.

A second project involves the acquisition of 10 acres of wetlands that encompass an 1,800-foot segment of Trout Creek. This $150,000 purchase used $75,000 of NRDA funds with an additional $75,000 in matching funds provided by the tribe. By protecting this wetland area from encroaching residential development, water quality and habitat will be improved. Plans include a stream restoration project that will offer an excellent opportunity for reintroduction of the historic trout population and protect the existing population of redside dace, a fish which is classified as a species of special concern in Wisconsin.

The third project will enhance wetland habitat along Duck Creek. This project uses $35,000 in NRDA funds along with $5,000 in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife program funding and $5,000 in Natural Resource Conservation Service Wildlife Habitat Incentives program funding to restore historic floodplain wetlands along Duck Creek. Invasive giant reed grass has degraded this area and aggressive strategies will be used to remove the reeds from the site so it can be reforested. Destroying this giant reed grass will limit its spread throughout the reservation and adjacent areas. The wetland restoration will improve habitat for waterfowl species nesting and rearing their young in the area as well as during migration.

Trustee Council *from Page 5*

- 1,684 acres of uplands protected forever
- 3,031 acres of wetlands protected forever
- walleye rearing facility completed
- Great Lakes spotted musky reintroduction project completed

The paper companies that have settlements with the natural resource trustees are Appleton Papers, Inc. and NCR Corp.; Wisconsin Tissue Mills, Inc. and Glatfelter; and Georgia-Pacific.

The natural resource trustees are comprised of the states of Wisconsin and Michigan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

For further information on the specific projects, contact Trustee Council Coordinator Colette Charbonneau, FWS, at Colette_Charbonneau@fws.gov or at (920) 866-1726.

Check out these Web sites:

http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/wm/foxriver/index.html

http://www.epa.gov/region5/sites/foxriver/

http://contaminants.fws.gov/Issues/Restoration.cfm

http://www.fws.gov/midwest/nrda/index.html

Information Available at Local Libraries

The Intergovernmental Partners invite the public to review technical reports, fact sheets and other documents related to the Lower Fox River cleanup at information repositories set up in the reference sections of the local libraries listed below. Information repositories at the public libraries in De Pere, Kaukauna, Little Chute, Neenah and Wrightstown have been discontinued. However, binders containing fact sheets are being maintained at these locations as well as at the following repositories:

- **Appleton Public Library**, 225 N. Oneida St., Appleton, Wis.; (920) 832-6170
- **Brown County Library**, 515 Pine St., Green Bay, Wis.; (920) 448-4381, Ext. 394
- **Door County Library**, 107 S. Fourth Ave., Sturgeon Bay, Wis.; (920) 743-6578
- **Oneida Community Library**, 201 Elm St., Oneida, Wis.; (920) 869-2210
- **Oshkosh Public Library**, 106 Washington Ave., Oshkosh, Wis.; (920) 236-5205

An administrative record, which contains detailed information upon which the selection of the final site cleanup plan was based, is also available for review at two DNR offices: 801 E. Walnut St., Green Bay, Wis. and 101 S. Webster St., 2nd Floor, Madison, Wis. An administrative record is also available at the EPA Record Center, 77 W. Jackson Blvd., 7th Floor, Chicago, Ill.

Prepared by the Fox River Intergovernmental Partnership: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Supporting agencies include Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in these articles are solely those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by all members of the Fox River Intergovernmental Partnership.

INSIDE FOX RIVER *CURRENT*

Fox River Current is published bimonthly by the Fox River Intergovernmental Partnership. Its purpose is to provide up-to-date information about cleanup and restoration efforts on the Lower Fox River. Call Greg Swanson at (608) 264-6024 to request a subscription or alternative format. Feedback on articles and ideas for future issues are welcome. Send comments to Greg Swanson, *Fox River Current*, DNR, CE/8, P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707 or e-mail <gregory.swanson@dnr.state.wi.us>

Office of Public Affairs (P-19J)
United States Environmental Protection Agency
Region 5
77 W. Jackson Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60604-3590